

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Original) A system for providing a joint between adjacent building panels, comprising:

each of said building panels including a first edge and a second edge such that the first edge of each of said building panels forms a first mechanical connection with the second edge of an adjacent one of the building panels locking the first and second edges of the building panels to each other in a first direction at right angles to a principal plane of the panels, and

a locking device arranged on a rear side of the building panels forming a second mechanical connection locking the building panels to each other in a second direction parallel to the principal plane and at right angles to the first and second edges, said locking device fitting within a locking groove extending parallel to and spaced apart from the first edge of said building panels, and which locking groove is open at the rear side of the building panels,

the locking device comprising a strip integrated with the second edge of each of said building panels, said strip extending throughout substantially an entire length of the second edge and being provided with a locking element projecting from the strip, such that when two adjacent building panels are joined together, the strip projects from the rear side of the

second edge of the panels with its locking element received in the locking groove of an adjacent building panel,

the building panels, when joined together, can occupy a relative position in said second direction where a play exists between the locking groove and a locking surface on the locking element that is facing the first and second edges and is operative in said second mechanical connection,

the first and the second mechanical connections both allow mutual displacement of the building panels in a direction of the first and second edges, and

the second mechanical connection enables the locking element to leave the locking groove if the respective building panel is turned about its first edge angularly away from the strip.

2. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein when the first edge is pressed against the second edge of the adjacent panel in said second direction and is turned angularly away from the strip, the maximum distance between the axis of rotation of the first edge and the locking surface of the locking groove closest to the first and second edges is such that the locking element can leave the locking groove without contacting the locking surface of the locking groove.

3. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 1 wherein, the locking surface of the locking element is extended from a front side of the strip through a height in said first direction that is less than or equal to 2 mm.

4. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the first mechanical connection is provided by the first edge engaging, in said first direction, between the second edge of the adjacent panel and a front side of the strip.

5. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the strip is made of a material different from that of the panel and fixedly mounted on the panel at the factory.

6. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the strip, at least for one of the two panels, is received in a countersunk groove in the rear side of this one panel.

7. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the strip is mounted in an ~~equalising~~ equalizing groove which is countersunk in the rear side of the panel and exhibits an exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the panel,

the part of the strip projecting behind the adjacent panel engages a corresponding ~~equalising~~ equalizing groove which is countersunk in the rear side of the adjacent panel and which exhibits the same exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the adjacent panel, and

the strip has at least such a thickness that the rear side of the strip is flush with the rear sides of the panels.

8. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the strip has such a thickness that it is only partly received in the ~~equalising~~ equalizing grooves.

9. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the strip is fixed to the strip panel by means of a mechanical connection.

10. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 9, wherein the mechanical connection between the strip and the panel comprises a gripping edge defined by two recesses in the rear side of the panel, and tongues; ~~and lips or the like~~ which are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposite outer sides of the gripping edge.

11. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 9, wherein the mechanical connection between the strip and the panel comprises a recess in the rear side of the panel, and tongues; ~~and lips or the like~~ which are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposing inner sides of the recess.

12. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the strip is fixed to the panel by means of a binder.

13. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the strip is made of a flexible; ~~preferably resilient material; such as sheet aluminum.~~

14. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the locking element consists of a locking edge extended continuously along the strip.

15. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the locking element consists of a plurality of spaced-apart locking elements distributed throughout the length of the strip.

16. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the panels are rectangular and intended, at each of their four edges, to be joined to a similar panel by a first mechanical connection of the aforementioned type and a second mechanical connection of the aforementioned type, each panel having a first pair of first and second edges, one of which is provided with a strip of the aforementioned type and the other of which is provided with a locking groove of the aforementioned type, and a second pair of opposite first and second edges, one of which is provided with a strip of the aforementioned type and the other of which is provided with a locking groove of the aforementioned type.

17. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 1, wherein an underlay of floor boards, foam, or felt ~~or the like~~ is fixed to the rear sides of the panels.

18. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 17, wherein the underlay is fixed so as to cover the strip in said second direction at least up to the locking element, such that

a joint between the underlays of the two adjacent panels is offset in said second direction relative to the first and second edges.

19. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein a sealing means, ~~such as a sealing compound, a rubber strip or the like,~~ is provided on the front side of the strip between the locking element and the first edge of the strip panel to seal against the adjacent panel.

20. (Original) A system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the locking surface of the locking element is extended from the front side of the strip through a height in said first direction that is less than or equal to 2 mm.

21. (Original) A system for providing a joint between adjacent building panels, comprising:

each of said building panels including a first edge and a second edge such that the first edge of each of said building panels forms a first mechanical connection with the second edge of an adjacent one of the building panels locking the first and second edges of the building panels to each other in a first direction at right angles to a principal plane of the panels, and

a locking device arranged on a rear side of the building panels forming a second mechanical connection locking the building panels to each other in a second direction parallel to the principal plane and at right angles to the first and second edges, said locking

device fitting within a locking groove extending parallel to and spaced apart from the first edge of said building panels, and which locking groove is open at the rear side of the building panels,

the locking device comprising a strip integrally formed with the second edge of each of said building panels, said strip extending throughout substantially an entire length of the second edge and being provided with a locking element projecting from the strip, such that when two adjacent building panels are joined together, the strip projects from the rear side of the second edge of the panels with its locking element received in the locking groove of an adjacent building panel,

the first and the second mechanical connections both allow mutual displacement of the building panels in a direction of the first and second edges, and

the second mechanical connection enables the locking element to leave the locking groove if the respective building panel is turned about its first edge angularly away from the strip.

22. (Original) A system for providing a joint between adjacent building panels, comprising:

each of said building panels including a first edge and a second edge such that the first edge of each of said building panels forms a first mechanical connection with the second edge of an adjacent one of the building panels locking the first and second edges of the building panels to each other in a first direction at right angles to a principal plane of the panels, and

a locking device arranged on a rear side of the building panels forming a second mechanical connection locking the building panels to each other in a second direction parallel to the principal plane and at right angles to the first and second edges, said locking device fitting within a locking groove extending parallel to and spaced apart from the first edge of said building panels, and which locking groove is open at the rear side of the building panels,

the locking device comprising a strip integrated with the second edge of each of said building panels, said strip extending throughout substantially an entire length of the second edge and being provided with a locking element projecting from the strip, such that when two adjacent building panels are joined together, the strip projects from the rear side of the second edge of the panels with its locking element received in the locking groove of an adjacent building panel,

the first and the second mechanical connections both allow mutual displacement of the building panels in a direction of the first and second edges, and the second mechanical connection enables the locking element to leave the locking groove if the respective building panel is turned about its first edge angularly away from the strip.

23. (Currently Amended) A system for providing a joint between adjacent building panels, comprising:

each of said building panels including a first edge and a second edge such that the first edge of each of said building panels forms a first mechanical connection with the second edge of an adjacent one of the building panels locking the first and second edges of

the building panels to each other in a first direction at right angles to a principal plane of the panels, and

a locking device arranged on a rear side of the building panels forming a second mechanical connection locking the building panels to each other in a second direction parallel to the principal plane and at right angles to the first and second edges, said locking device fitting within a locking groove extending parallel to and spaced apart from the first edge of said building panels, and which locking groove is open at the rear side of the building panels,

the locking device comprising a strip integrated with the second edge of each of said building panels, said strip being provided with a locking element projecting from the strip, such that when two adjacent building panels are joined together, the strip projects from the rear side of the second edge of the panels with its locking element received in the locking groove of an adjacent building panel,

the first and the second mechanical connections both allow mutual displacement of the building panels in a direction of the first and second edges, and

the second mechanical connection enables the locking element to leave the locking groove if the respective building panel is turned about its first edge angularly away from the strip;

wherein the strip is mounted in an equalizing groove which is countersunk in the rear side of each of the building panels and exhibits an exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the panel,

the part of the strip projecting behind the adjacent panel engages a corresponding equalising equalizing groove which is countersunk in the rear side of the adjacent panel and which exhibits the same exact, predetermined distance from its bottom to the front side of the adjacent panel, and

the strip has at least such a thickness that the rear side of the strip is flush with the rear sides of the panels.

24. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 22, wherein the strip is made of a material different from that of the building panel and fixedly mounted on the building panel at the factory.

25. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein the strip is fixed to the building panel by means of a mechanical connection.

26. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the mechanical connection between the strip and the building panel comprises a gripping edge defined by two recesses in the rear side of the building panel, and tongues or lips, which are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposite outer sides of the gripping edge.

27. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the mechanical connection between the strip and the building panel comprises a recess in the

rear side of the panel, and tongues or lips, which are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposing inner sides of the recess.

28. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein the strip is fixed to the building panel by means of a binder.

29. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein the strip is made of a flexible resilient material.

30. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein the strip is made of sheet aluminum.

31. (Previously Presented) A system for providing a joint between adjacent building panels, comprising:

each of said building panels including a first edge and a second edge such that the first edge of each of said building panels forms a first mechanical connection with the second edge of an adjacent one of the building panels locking the first and second edges of the building panels to each other in a first direction at right angles to a principal plane of the panels, and

a locking device arranged on a rear side of the building panels forming a second mechanical connection locking the building panels to each other in a second direction parallel to the principal plane and at right angles to the first and second edges, said locking

device fitting within a locking groove extending parallel to and spaced apart from the first edge of said building panels, and which locking groove is open at the rear side of the building panels,

the locking device comprising a strip formed at the second edge of each of said building panels, said strip extending throughout substantially an entire length of the second edge and being provided with a locking element projecting from the strip, such that when two adjacent building panels are joined together, the strip projects from the rear side of the second edge of the panels with its locking element received in the locking groove of an adjacent building panel, and

the locking groove and the locking element being dimensioned such that when adjacent panels are joined together and the locking element is received within the locking groove, there is sufficient space within the locking groove to allow mutual displacement of the adjacent panels in a direction of the first and second edges and to enable the locking element to leave the locking groove if the respective building panel is turned about its first edge angularly away from the locking strip.

32. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the panels are rectangular and intended, at each of their four edges, to be joined to a similar panel by a first mechanical connection of the aforementioned type and a second mechanical connection of the aforementioned type, each panel having a first pair of first and second edges, one of which is provided with a strip of the aforementioned type and the other of which is provided with a locking groove of the aforementioned type, and a second pair of

opposite first and second edges, one of which is provided with a strip of the
aforementioned type and the other of which is provided with a locking groove of the
aforementioned type.

33. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the strip is
made of a material that is different than a remainder of the building panel.

34. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 33, wherein the strip is
made of aluminum.

35. (Currently Amended) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the strip is
made of a same material as a remainder of the building panel, and the strip is integrally
formed with the building panel. ~~24. A system as claimed in claim 22, wherein the strip is
made of a material different from that of the building panel and fixedly mounted on the
building panel at the factory.~~

36. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the strip is
fixed to the building panel by means of a mechanical connection.

37. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 36, wherein the
mechanical connection between the strip and the building panel comprises a gripping edge
defined by two recesses in the rear side of the building panel, and tongues or lips, which

are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposite outer sides of the gripping edge.

38. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 36, wherein the mechanical connection between the strip and the building panel comprises a recess in the rear side of the panel, and tongues or lips, which are bent or punched from the strip and which press against opposing inner sides of the recess.

39. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the strip is fixed to the building panel by means of a binder.

40. (Previously Presented) A system as claimed in claim 31, wherein the strip is made of a flexible resilient material.

41. (New) The system of claim 13, wherein the strip is made of sheet aluminum.

42. (New) The system of claim 19, wherein the sealing means is a rubber strip.

43. (New) The system of claim 19, wherein the sealing means is a sealing compound.